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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000288

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT DELIVERED TO GOB

REF: STATE 31996

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Pol/Econ Chief delivered the 2004 Bahrain Human Rights Report to MFA Director of Bilateral Relations Dhafer Alumran February 28. Alumran pledged to disseminate the report within the GOB and instructed an assistant to fax it to Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, currently in London. Commenting on government-initiated reform efforts, Ambassador Alumran said "although we know we have many things to do, we are moving in the right direction."

2. (C) PolOff met with MFA Assistant Undersecretary for Coordination and Follow-up Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa March 1 to discuss the Human Rights Report. Sheikh Abdul Aziz stated that overall the report seemed more positive than in recent years, but that the GOB disputed some sections of it pertaining to judicial independence, the role of parliament, treatment of prisoners, and discrimination against Shi'a.

3. (C) The Bahrain Tribune, a pro-government newspaper, published a front page article March 1 on the Human Rights Report entitled "U.S. Hails Reforms, Freedoms in Bahrain." The lengthy article focused almost exclusively on passages from the report focusing on positive actions the GOB has taken with regard to human rights in the last year. In the coming days, other newspapers and civil society organizations will likely highlight portions of the report that are more critical of the government.

4. (U) The 2004 Bahrain Human Rights Report was posted on Embassy Manama's website March 1.
MONROE